



# **The Best Medicine**

**demogorgns**

## The Best Medicine by demogorgns

**Category:** IT (2017)

**Genre:** Canon Era, Caring, Childhood Sweethearts, Cuddling & Snuggling, Established Relationship, Fluff, Friendship, Illnesses, Kissing, Light Angst, M/M, Making Out, Sick Character, Sickfic, Tooth-Rotting Fluff

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kasprak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stan Uris

**Relationships:** Richie Tozier/St Stanley Uris

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2017-10-07

**Updated:** 2017-10-22

**Packaged:** 2020-01-29 13:20:08

**Rating:** General Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 3

**Words:** 6,859

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Stan is sick in bed and facing a day of boredom and loneliness. Richie has other ideas. Laughter is, as they say, the best medicine...

# 1. Prince Richie To The Rescue

## Author's Note:

surprise bitch, i bet you thought you'd seen the last of that stozier bullshit from me  
well, i'll have you know i have no life and nothing better to do than think about these precious boys, so have some disgustingly sweet fluff - set in 1989 with no pennywise (so no angst to be seen)  
this is just gonna be a two/three chapter thing (hopefully) but i hope you all enjoy it anyway!

Stan's mom pressed a hand to his forehead, frowning anxiously. "Oh, sweetie. You're really burning up."

"I'll be fine, honestly," Stan protested croakily, feeling anything but. His head pounded, his throat burned, and he could no longer breathe through his stuffed nose. He'd been fine yesterday, just sneezing a lot, but he'd spent the night in torment, unable to sleep through the fever and the burning in his throat. As soon as his mother had come in to get him out of bed, she'd demanded he stay home.

"Stan, honey, there's no way you can go to school like this."

"I have a Math test, Mom. I can't stay home."

"Stanley, do you ever think you might be so sick *because* you stay up at all hours studying?" His mother raised an eyebrow at him. "Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't work hard, but just for today...do you think you could take a break? School will still be there when you're recovered. It's not going to fall down a hole."

"That's what *you* think," Stan muttered. It came out more like *dath's doth* you *dink*. His mother sighed.

"I'm sorry Stan. I'm sure you'll be able to catch up in no time." She kissed him on the forehead. "I'll be downstairs if you need anything. Just shout."

He watched her leave dejectedly. A whole day of nothing but sniffing, sweating, coughing and boredom stretched out before him. Meanwhile, the other Losers would probably already be on their way to school, meeting each other on the street corners and racing each other to campus, teasing each other. Richie would be making jokes that by the time Stan saw them again would already be old, and he would refuse to explain them just to be annoying, Stan knew. Truth be told, it was a whole day without Richie that really made him miserable, not that he'd ever admit it. Stan sighed and stared at the ceiling, loneliness crushing him. Faintly, he heard the shrill ring of the phone and tried to sit up a little, hope igniting in his chest. When he heard his mother's voice answer and, a few seconds later, her footsteps on the stairs, he sat up properly.

"It's Richie, sweetie," she said, holding out the phone. The cord was just long enough to stretch up the stairs from the hallway wall. Stan leaned out precariously to take the receiver from her.

"Hey, Richie." Stan fought a grin, happy to have contact with his boyfriend at least, even if he couldn't see him in person.

"Hey. I just called to see how you were since you seemed pretty sick yesterday, and your mom told me you were staying home? Are you okay?" Richie had seen he looked ill yesterday, Richie had worried, worried enough to call and check up on him. Suddenly, Stan was smiling widely.

"I feel pretty bad, but it's okay. I just wish Mom would let me come to school."

"Are you nuts? For one, no-one sane passes up an opportunity to lay around in bed all day being fussed over and watching TV. Second, you sound like you have the plague. If you came in to school I'd take you home myself."

"Aw, really, *Mommy?*"

"I'm serious, Stan. You sound like you smoke twenty a day."

"Thanks."

"Is your mom still there?" Stan glanced over to the doorway. His mother smiled at him, and tapped her wrist; *start to wrap it up, sweetie*. He nodded at her.

"Yeah, why?"

"Listen, don't react to what I'm about to say." Stan rolled his eyes. "You just rolled your eyes, didn't you?"

"Maybe. What am I supposed to be not reacting too?"

"Shh! Don't give the game away. I'm gonna come round to see you -"

"No, Richie you have -"

"If you say 'you have a Math test' I will reach down this phone line and smack you."

"You *do*."

"Who cares? My precious Stanley is sick and needs my utmost attention." Richie was putting on his *brave masculine hero* voice.

"My mom'll be home all day." Stan snuck a glance at his mother and saw her frown quizzically at him. *Uh-oh*.

"Then I'll sneak in the window. I'm ninja-quiet." *Quiet* was the last word Stan would have used to describe his boyfriend, but Richie was world-class at getting into places he wasn't supposed to be. All the same, Stan could see this little escapade turning into a real headache for him, and since at this moment he had an actual, *physical* headache he wasn't exactly in the mood for Richie's antics. Nevertheless, Richie's presence *would* at least make the boring, lonely day Stan had planned a tad more fun. Not that he'd ever tell Richie that. His head was big enough already.

"There's nothing I can say to get you not to do this, right?"

"Correct, as ever, Stanley. I'm practically at your place already." Stan groaned, hung up, and handed the phone back to his mom.

"What was Richie saying?" His mother scrutinised him carefully.

“Oh, just seeing if I’d be in school today,” Stan lied, feeling a mixture of anticipation and dread. Richie was wonderful, Stan loved him, of course he did, he was a great boyfriend...but whether Stan could handle him in his present condition was another matter entirely. Still, it was better than being without him for a whole day. He guessed.

Richie, meanwhile, was determined to make what was no doubt shaping up to be a crappy day for Stan as good as it possibly could be. Packing some crucial items in his backpack, he cycled recklessly fast to Stan’s house, slaloming through cars and ignoring the shouts and blasts of horn, skipping onto the pavement, cutting down back streets and through parks. He abandoned his bike on Stan’s street corner, padlocking it to a slender sapling on a patch of scrub land, and pondered his next move. Stan’s place was the third one down, his window facing the back garden, so there were three white picket fences in between Richie and his fair maiden, not to mention rose bushes, angry dogs and possibly angrier neighbours. And, of course, Stan’s mom – who, while too sweet to be scary, would definitely send him packing if she spotted him trying to get to Stan.

“Well, if that one-inch-wonder Prince Charming could do it...” Richie muttered under his breath. He took a couple of steps’ run up to the first fence, jumped, and caught the top with the tips of his fingers.

Pulling himself up and over in a scramble, he landed with a huff in the garden, immediately up and alert for any sign of life in the garden or the house. Nothing moved, but Richie had put a scuff in the lush green lawn where he’d landed, which he felt vaguely guilty about. He glanced about shiftily, took a run up to the next fence, and scaled that one too. Two down, one to go. This house clearly had kids – Richie nearly faceplanted into a swing set as he jumped down, there was a tricycle abandoned near the house, and the large tree at the bottom of the garden had a dangerously wonky-looking tree-house perched in its branches. The main branch supporting the tree-house stretched over the opposite fence. An idea sparked in Richie’s brain. He scrambled to the tree, pressing himself against the trunk, and peeked round it to the house at the opposite end of the garden. No movement. No voices. He scaled the ladder of slats nailed to the trunk with ease and poked his head up through the hole in the floor. Two young girls, about five or six, stopped their dolls’ tea party to

stare wide-eyed and open-mouthed at Richie.

*Shit.*

"Hello, ladies," Richie smiled his most winning smile. "Mind if I cut through your charming home? I'm trying to get to my princess, you see. He – *she's* trapped in a tower on the other side of that fence, and I need to kiss her to free her from her curse."

"Are you a prince, then?" the girl with long blonde hair and bangs asked. Richie nodded, getting into the part.

"Sure am. The bravest and most handsomest in the kingdom."

"I didn't know princes could have glasses," the blonde one replied with childish suspicion.

"Only the really smart ones."

"Is your princess pretty?" piped up the brown-haired girl.

"The prettiest," Richie replied, smiling as he thought of Stan. The girl pondered that for a moment.

"I guess you better get going and kiss her then," she decided finally. Her blonde friend nodded solemnly. Richie gave them as flourishing a bow as he could in the tight space.

"Thank you, my ladies. I will never forget your kindness." Richie carefully stepped over the plastic tea set and Barbies and put his foot through the window, stepping out onto the wide branch. A quick balancing act later and he was dropping down into Stan's garden at last.

He spotted Stan's mom moving about in the kitchen almost immediately and ducked behind the rose bush to hide. She stayed by the refrigerator for a few minutes, putting back a carton of milk, and then moved out of sight of the window again. Richie heaved a sigh of relief and stood up, brushing rose petals out of his hair. On impulse, he pulled a rose from the bush, wincing and sucking his pricked fingers, but pleased with the heavy white bloom. Then he cast about for a stone – big enough to make a noise when it hit Stan's window,

but small enough that it wouldn't break the glass. Weapon chosen, he wound up and let fly at the bay window. It clattered nicely against the glass and dropped to the ground. Richie waited a few seconds, and just as he was about to grab the stone and try again, the window slid open and Stan's curly dark head poked out. Richie waved.

Stan stood back as Richie crawled through his window, all long skinny limbs flailing ungainly, and flopped down on the window seat with a sigh. "My princess!" he said brightly, squinting up at Stan, who could see himself reflected upside down in Richie's glasses. "I've found you at last!" He stuck out his hand. Clutched in it was a white rose from the bush in the garden below. Richie's hand was bleeding all over the stem, his hair was messy and full of twigs and flower petals, his knees almost black with soil.

Stan frowned as he gingerly took the rose from Richie's hand. "Princess? What's that supposed to me – ah – ah -" He sneezed violently. Richie beamed at him like he was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

"It was tough getting to you Stanley, I don't mind telling you. Worth it though."

"Uh-huh." Stan stumbled back into bed, suddenly feeling dizzy. Richie sat cross-legged on the other end of the bed and unzipped his backpack. "Thanks for coming though. Even though it is the stupidest idea you've ever had, probably, and if we get caught we'll both be in huge trouble."

Richie had stopped listening at 'thanks for coming' and was busy digging in his backpack. "Okay, we got comics from Big Bill...he also sends his sympathies, and says he'll come over after school with the work you missed. He's sweet, bless him, but boring. Eddie Spaghetti is, as you can imagine, not coming over for fear of becoming infected with your fatal illness and falling down dead, or, failing that, being quarantined until he's twenty by the charming Ms. Kaspbrak. He does, however, send a *lot* of cold remedies. Mike offered books, because like you he is a huge nerd, and Ben sends his mom's cookies, which I may have to eat for you." Comic books, bottles of medicine, two paperbacks and a Tupperware box of cookies spilled out onto Stan's bed. He could feel a grin slowly spread across his face.



“Finally, Miss Marsh sends cigarettes. She seemed to think they’d help. I’m less sure, but who am I to refuse a lady?” The pack of cigarettes landed on the top of the pile.

“And what did you bring?” Stan smiled at Richie.

“Why, my winning personality, of course,” Richie grinned back. “And the pleasure of my body, should you require it.”

Stan leaned forward to punch him lightly on the shoulder. “Don’t be gross,” he groaned, but the smile wasn’t slipping.

“Now, where’s the kiss for the brave hero?” Richie waggled his eyebrows at Stan.

“Is the brave hero sure he wants one? I’m kind of toxic at the moment.”

“No illness could dampen the flames of my desire for you, my love,” Richie declared dramatically, throwing his head back with a hand on his heart. Stan smiled as Richie leaned in and pressed his lips to Stan’s, a soft fluttering of birds wings that set Stan’s heart fluttering too.

“There,” Richie said softly. He pulled away, but his face remained close to Stan’s, smiling as he looked into his eyes. “Now we’re all set for a pretty good day off school. Not Ferris Bueller standards, I’ll admit, but pretty good.”

Stan nodded. “Pretty good,” he had to agree.

## 2. A Rose By Any Other Name

### Notes for the Chapter:

sakjddljsljldls this is so sickeningly fluffy lmao - it's not very long but brevity is the soul of wit  
hope you enjoy!

The room was quiet and peaceful, the buzz of the TV in the background calming Stan as he read. Richie was laid with his head in Stan's lap, squinting at one of Bill's comics, while Stan read one of the paperbacks Mike sent with one hand, idly stroking Richie's hair with the other. After about fifteen minutes, though, Stan began to feel that tell-tale tickle in the back of his throat and sat up, coughing sharply. Richie sat up too, eyes full of concern behind his glasses.

"Hey, you okay? Here, drink this..." He slid off the bed and grabbed the glass of water from the bedside table, carefully leaning over to offer it to Stan. He accepted gratefully, sipping carefully so he didn't cough it back up.

"T-thanks," Stan gasped.

"Wow, you're worse at breathing than Eddie," Richie quipped.

"Well, you're worse at jokes than..." He paused to think. Richie quirked an eyebrow at him. "Yeah, I got nothing," he was forced to admit.

"Your wit is truly *sparkling* today, my love." The British Guy voice was making a return.

"I'm sick, okay? My brain is being squeezed by all the mucus in my skull."

"Charming." Richie flopped back down on the bed, feet, still in his dirt-encrusted sneakers, resting on the pillow. Stan sighed.

"If you're gonna do that, at least take your shoes off."

"Anything for you, pumpkin patch." He swung his feet off the bed

and leaned down to unlace them.

“*Pumpkin patch*?”

“Just trying it out. You’re not into it?”

“I guess it’s better than ‘sugar toes’. Not much better, but better.”

“You’re gonna have to give me some cute nicknames as well.”

“First, I wouldn’t call your nicknames *cute*. Second, I think ‘my significant annoyance’ works quite well.”

“You’re a terrible boyfriend.” Richie got back on the bed, this time with his head on the pillow next to Stan. He smiled and reached out a hand to brush a tawny brown curl from Stan’s damp forehead. “*Urgh*. You’re so sweaty and gross.”

“Then why are you still touching me?” Stan smiled back.

“Because even when you’re swimming in germs, you’re still irresistible to me,” Richie grinned, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively. Stan snorted with laughter and pushed him away gently.

“Nice try. You’re probably just hoping to get sick yourself so you can stay off school.”

“Nah, actually *being* sick off school instead of just cutting class is super boring.”

“So you really *do* just find me irresistible?”

“Bet your ass,” Richie mumbled, looking at Stan’s lips. Despite his flu, Stan felt that familiar swooping in his chest as Richie’s eyes drifted over his face and his hand came down from Stan’s hair to gently stroke his fever-hot cheek with his thumb. He leaned in and pressed warm, soft lips to Stan’s. Stan leaned into it, his mouth opening instinctively with a soft gasp into Richie’s mouth, and Richie’s lips closed, velvet soft, around Stan’s bottom lip and sucked gently on it. Then they parted for a second and pressed back together again, and Stan felt the flick of Richie’s tongue, so hot and wet, teasing the

corner of his mouth and then pressing gently inside. Stan leaned back, breaking the kiss before Richie's tongue made contact with his own.

"Rich," he murmured reproachfully. "You'll get sick. Surely my mouth tastes disgusting anyway?"

"Nuh-uh," Richie shook his head, still staring at Stan's lips. "You taste just fine to me." He had turned further to face Stan, his legs now curled up under him, their bodies pressed together with the comforter between them. Richie leaned in again, more determined this time, and Stan's mouth opened without permission, their lips and tongues colliding together, and Stan's hand curled in Richie's hair to hold him closer. He could feel Richie's glasses digging into his face, but he didn't care. Richie let his weight fall on Stan a little, pressing him into the pillows as his hand tangled in Stan's curls and he stroked his tongue slowly behind Stan's teeth, luxuriating in the sensations. Their kisses had been rare, shy and chaste for months, but now they were getting used to being together, proper make-out sessions had become the order of the day. Richie experimentally took Stan's bottom lip in his teeth as softly as he could and was gratified when Stan jumped a little and his fingers tightened in Richie's hair, pulling him even closer. Their noses bumped and Richie sniggered into Stan's mouth. All Stan could feel was soft lips and wet tongue, a whirlwind of sensations that left his head spinning (*or maybe you're just getting light-headed from lack of oxygen*, said a snide little voice in his head), and even if Richie's technique was lacking a little, he more than made up for it with sheer enthusiasm -

A knock on the door rudely jolted them from their reverie. Stan sat up in a scramble, horrified. Richie sat up as well, pushing his lopsided glasses back into place. They both stared with terror at the door.

"Stan? Baby? Do you want me to make you something for lunch?"

"Uh, I'm not really hungry, thanks Mom," Stan lied, motioning for Richie to get into the closet. Richie nodded and scooped up as much of the stuff he'd brought with him as he could fit in his arms, sliding off the bed and opening the closet door as quietly as he could. Just as he closed the door, the bedroom door opened.

"Are you sure?" Stan's mother asked from the doorway. "I can make you soup if you want."

Stan shook his head, face in flames. "I'm sure, Mom. I feel kinda nauseous."

"Okay. You look even more flushed than this morning, poor baby." Inside the closet, Richie bit his lip to keep from laughing.

"Yeah, I still don't feel great," Stan replied quickly, hoping to get her out of the room. "I think maybe I might try to get some sleep."

"That's sounds like a good idea. Here, let me close the curtains for you," his mother replied, walking round the bed to the bay window. She frowned. "Did you open the window, sweetie?"

"Uh, yeah. I was too hot," Stan replied. He could have sworn he heard a swiftly-aborted snort of laughter from the closet.

His mother slid the window closed carefully and closed the curtains, leaving the room dim and quiet with the light from the open doorway spilling in. She frowned again she walked back round the bed and kicked one of Eddie's bottles of cold remedy that Richie hadn't managed to pick up in time, sending it rolling across the room. "What is this?" she asked as she bent to pick it up.

Stan's blood froze. "Oh, that? Just cold medicine. Dad brought it in before he went to work," he lied airily, surprised at how coolly he reacted.

"Really? I never saw him come up here."

Stan nodded, glad his flaming face was hidden in shadow. "Yeah, I guess he didn't want to bother you," he replied.

His mother narrowed her eyes suspiciously, but her smile was mischievous. "Stanley, is there something you want to tell me?"

"No..." *Oh God, I need a coughing fit, or a fainting spell, anything, please...* His mother shrugged.

"Okay. I believe you." She turned to go, and in the closet, Richie

heaved a silent sigh of relief. Until another of Eddie's bottles slipped from his fingers and clattered to the floor.

Stan's mother turned. "What was that?" Stan glowed bright red and faked a loud coughing fit.

"W-what was what?" he pretended to croak. His mother opened her mouth as if to say something, glanced towards the closet, and thought better of it.

"Okay, sweetie. See you soon, and make sure to get some sleep."

"Will do, Mom." She closed the door behind her with a light snap. Richie waited until her footsteps on the stairs had fallen silent before he stepped out of the closet.

"Wow. That was super close."

"No kidding. I told you we'd get into trouble."

"She didn't see me, did she? We're fine, Stan the Man. We've got this." He dropped the armful of stuff back on the bed. Books, the Tupperware box, Richie's backpack and shoes, the rose, all spilled across the bedspread, but Stan didn't really mind. Richie snatched up the rose and stuck it between his teeth. Stan groaned. "Now, where were we?" Richie asked with difficulty around the thorny stem, eyebrows raised.

"I was about to take a nap," Stan deadpanned. Richie's face fell.

"But kissing?" he pouted, teeth still clenched around the rose.

"I'm so not kissing you after you've had that thing in your mouth."

"Yeah." Richie removed it carefully, grimacing. "It did taste kinda gross. Also, my tongue is bleeding."

"You're a dumbass," Stan said affectionately.

"Yeah, but I'm your dumbass," Richie grinned, hopping up on the bed. "Go on then, Princess Stanley, catch up on your beauty sleep."

“Okay, Prince Richie,” Stan sighed. He did feel pretty tired. His eyes had that itching, aching feeling they get whenever you stay up too long, and the flu was making him dizzy and light-headed. He rubbed his face in the pillow as Richie leaned over and carefully tugged the comforter over Stan’s shoulder. Soon, the dull buzz of the TV and Richie’s steady breathing lulled him to sleep.

Richie watched Stan sleep, his steady breathing, his chin tucked into his chest, curled up under the covers. So often, when he was awake, Stan was frowning, the little crease between his eyebrows making him look grumpier than he really was; but now he looked softer and younger than Richie had ever seen him. His rumpled brown curls pressed lazily into the pillow and fell over his forehead, and occasionally he shifted, snuggling further into the covers like a sleeping animal. Richie loved it. He lay with his arm on the pillow, curving over Stan’s head, his fingers just brushing his hair, unable to stop staring at his peacefully sleeping face. Eventually, he felt his own eyes grow heavy, the thick, golden afternoon wrapping round him and carrying him off. He tried to fight it, but he soon slipped into oblivion himself; his glasses still lopsidedly on and digging into his face as he slept, open mouthed and curled round Stan’s sleeping form like he was protecting him.

Unknown to the two sleeping boys, the door to Stan’s room opened a crack. His mother smiled as she saw them, curled around each other – they had shifted in their sleep so now Richie’s back was to Stan, and Stan had his face buried in Richie’s neck and hair, cradling him like a teddy bear, arms wrapped round his chest and legs round his waist. Mrs Uris crept in as quietly as she could, and gently removed Richie’s glasses, placing them silently on the bedside table. Then she closed the door softly on the peaceful, private scene.

### 3. Shenanigans, Antics and Shenenigans

When Richie woke the room was darker than before, the light creeping in around the curtains faint and pale. Stan still slept – Richie could feel his breath on his neck, his arms wrapped tight around his waist. Somewhere, a clock ticked, and birds called to each other outside the window, birds Stan would have told Richie the name of were he not dozing against Richie's back. It was nice just to lie there, feeling Stan's heart beating, so warm, so alive. In his sleep, Stan's lips moved against Richie's neck and sent shivers down his spine, contented tremors, nerves singing all the way down to his toes. Richie blinked, coming to a slow realisation – the world was fuzzy, somehow. He'd thought it was just sleep, but then he felt – or rather, didn't feel – the lack of glasses on his face, and sat up. Rubbing his eyes, as if that would fix his eyesight, he patted around what he assumed was the bedside cabinet until he felt the frames under his fingers and slid them on, narrowly avoiding taking his eye out. He glanced behind him and was a little disappointed to find Stan had woken up, although it was a compensation when he smiled at Richie sleepily.

"Hi."

"Hi, Stan the Man. Feeling refreshed?"

"Did you fall asleep too?"

"I was resting my eyes."

"Okay, sure."

"I can confirm the beauty sleep worked. My love, you are positively dazzling to the eyes!" Richie crowed in his terrible British accent. Stan sat up, blinking blearily. His curls were smushed into his head on one side, his face was deathly pale save the dark rings under his eyes and his nose was, if possible, even more red. Richie had never seen anything so beautiful.

"Well, you look gorgeous too. Nice drool. Really compliments your chin." Richie hurriedly wiped his face with the hem of his shirt. Stan



sighed, but a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth. "Do you know what time it is?"

Richie peered at the clock on the bedside table. "4:18...hey! The others'll be out of school!"

"Finally."

"What, my company not enough for you, Stanley?"

"Let's just say I'm looking forward to having some backup."

Richie swatted him on the arm. "You oughta be nicer to me. I came all the way here, risking life and limb -" He went silent and red, cut off by the kiss planted on his lips.

"Thank you. I'm glad you came," Stan smiled softly, pulling away. Wow, did he love to make Richie blush. Even his ears glowed, just from that one chaste kiss. For all his talk about girls and sex and all the things he done, Richie could be pretty shy at times.

"Hey, me too," said Richie with a shy grin. "This was way more fun than school. You need to skip more often."

Stan wrinkled his brow. "I don't think so. Just talking about skipping school makes me anxious. Think of all the work we've miss-" It was his turn to be cut off. Richie's lips were clumsy, but oh, so soft and warm. *Here we go again*, Stan had time to think ruefully before Richie's thumb brushed over Stan's bottom lip, his tongue slipping into his mouth, and Stan lost the power of sensible thought.

It could have been hours, or even days later (but more likely minutes) when the sound of the doorbell caused Richie and Stan to resurface. Richie sat up, admiring Stan's messy curls, flushed cheeks and swollen lips for a second. "That's a real view, Stan the Man. I could look at this for *hours*."

"Ssh. Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Below, Stan could hear his mother open the door and the sound of several voices babbling together. He sat up quickly, dislodging Richie from his lap. "Hey!"

Footsteps hammered up the stairs and the door burst open. "Stan! How're ya feeling?" Beverly beamed, the first one through the door. Ben followed her, grinning sheepishly at the boys on the bed, then Mike, then Bill (shaking his head and stuttering "Be kuh-*quiet*, guys, he's s-s-sick, remember?" in a motherly voice) and finally and unexpectedly Eddie, who hovered anxiously at the door instead of coming in. Stanley's bedroom was suddenly filled with thirteen-year-old yammering and jostling as the Losers tried to find seats.

"Hi guys," Stan said weakly, flopping back onto the pillows, head pounding. Richie stood up.

"Welcome to the Uris homestead, friends and neighbours! How was school? Did you behave yourselves?" Richie wagged an exaggerated finger at his friends. Eddie frowned from the doorway.

"You made it here, Rich? How did you not get caught?"

"I'm very stealthy, Eddie Spaghetti." Eddie snorted with derision but wisely decided not to get into it. "What're you doing here anyways, I thought you were too afraid of catching Stan's plague to show up?"

"I'm not *five*, I can handle a cold," Eddie protested, but still lingered in the doorway, studying his sneaker-encased toes. "How *are* you doing, Stan? Do you still feel contagious?"

"I don't think you can *feel* contagious, Eddie," Mike interjected wisely. "I'm sure you're okay to come in anyway." Eddie moved in cautiously and sat next to Mike on Stan's desk, moving his neatly organised pencils carefully out of his way.

"I'm feeling fine guys, really," Stan protested. Richie rolled his eyes.

"You're fooling no-one, Stanley. We can all see the cold, clammy hand of Death on your shoulder." He pressed a hand to his forehead in a mock swoon. "Ah *do* declare, Stanleh, if you die Ah won't know *what* Ah'll do! We'll have to sell the plantation -"

"Beep-beep, Richie," Stan deadpanned. Richie straightened up, dropping his hand to his side as Bev and Mike stifled giggles.

"Okay, okay. But seriously, you still don't look great."

"H-he's right," Bill cut in. "You're r-r-really pale."

"Did you take some of the cold remedy I sent?" Eddie piped up. "It should work, it's pretty strong."

"Yeah, but is it kosher?" Richie grinned.

"So what if it's not? I'm pretty sure your tongue isn't either, but I've had that down my throat plenty of times today," Stan fired back smoothly. Richie's face glowed as Bev gave an incredibly unladylike snort of laughter.

"Wow!" she crowed. "What *have* you two been up to today?"

"Shenanigans, Miss Marsh," Richie supplied, joking away his embarrassment. "Antics and shenanigans."

"*Urgh*," said Eddie firmly. "That's disgusting. Do you know how much bacteria is in a person's mouth? And that's just normally, imagine how gross *Stan's* mouth is today. You'll come down with it too, Richie."

"Cheers, Dr. K. I'll bear that one in mind next time *you* get a cold. Hopefully it'll help curb the instinct to make out with *you*," Eddie retched theatrically as Richie wagged his tongue at him.

"Did you get any time to read between the antics and shenanigans?" Mike asked Stan, smiling ruefully over Richie and Eddie's arguing heads.

"Yeah, thanks Mike. Thanks for everything, guys. Ben, tell your mom we loved the cookies."

Ben beamed. "Yeah, I ate pretty much all of them, Ben," Richie cut in. "I'm telling ya, if I had food like that in the house all the time, I'd be a Haystack too."

"Beep-beep, Richie," Stan said crossly. Richie looked anxious for a second, worried he'd gone too far, but Ben was still smiling.

They spent the rest of the afternoon talking, laughing, eating and watching TV. When Stan's mom came up to tell them dinner was

ready, she gave Richie a knowing smile. “Richie, I didn’t see you come in?”

“Uh...I guess I must have been at the back.”

“Of course,” she smiled, eyes sparkling. Richie blushed a little, adjusted his glasses nervously, and followed the others downstairs. Even Stan felt well enough to come with them, finally getting a healthier colour in his cheeks and some of the shine back in his hazel eyes. Richie held his arm gently as they went down the stairs anyway, worried he was still feeling dizzy. When they said goodbye later that night at the door, Richie winked at Stan – though they couldn’t kiss right there in front of the others and Stan’s parents, Stan felt a warm glow spread through him at that wink, and went to bed smiling. Lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling, his face glowing and aching from smiling in the gloom, Stan considered just how lucky he was. Seeing his friends walking through his bedroom door had dispelled any feelings of loneliness or fear he’d felt...but then, he supposed those feelings had left him much earlier, when he heard the clattering of pebbles on his bedroom window and saw Richie standing, grinning from ear to ear in his garden. As if he’d conjured the sound from his imagination, Stan heard the clattering against the window once more. Sitting bolt upright, he rushed to the window and drew back the curtains. Silhouetted against the pink and gold glow of the setting sun, Richie grinned up at Stan.

“Soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the East, and Stanley is the Sun,” he called up dramatically, one hand pressed to his chest.

“I didn’t know you could read,” Stan called back down, “Let alone read Shakespeare.”

“Well, if you don’t *want* a kiss goodnight, I guess I’ll leave...”

“Get up here, dumbass.”

Richie’s ascent, practised earlier that day, was slightly more graceful this time. He stepped through Stan’s window rather than falling through it. As soon as both feet were on the floor of Stan’s room, Richie kissed him, threading his fingers through his curls and

pressing him to his chest. Stan stumbled a little as he was pulled downwards by the shorter boy, curving his arms round Richie's skinny shoulders to steady himself. When they broke apart, Richie's glasses were a little fogged up.

"So I take it this means you want me to stay the night?" Richie grinned lasciviously. Stan blushed.

"Absolutely *not*."

Richie smiled earnestly to show he had only been joking. "Okay, I promise not to steal your virtue, Stan the Man. At least, not tonight."

"Don't leave *just* yet, though."

"I gotta go sometime, Stanley," Richie replied softly, taking Stan's hand and softly stroking his palm with his thumb. "I can't live in your bedroom like a pet."

"You *could*," Stan mumbled at the floor, pouting uncharacteristically.

"Now, that's the least Stan-like thing you've ever said," Richie chuckled. "Don't be dumb. I'll see you at school tomorrow, okay? Bright and early, for once. I know you won't be able to stand cutting class twice in a row."

*I could stand it for you*, Stan thought, but said nothing. He watched Richie slip back through the window, climb down the rose trellis, and take a running jump at the fence. Then he was gone, and Stan left the window and curled back up in a bed that felt a little empty without Richie's warmth and weight in his arms and the scent of his hair.

The next day Stan woke up with a huge weight off his chest. He could breathe through both nostrils again (how did he ever take that for granted before?), his head was clear and no longer pounding, his skin no longer shimmering with fever. He bounced out of bed, remembering Richie's promise to see him at school, and washed and dressed with more enthusiasm than was entirely normal for a Wednesday morning, stabbing himself twice in the head with bobby pins as he attempted to secure his kippah to his unruly curls as quickly as possible. He even rushed his usually meticulous check of

all his books and pencils for class, swinging his backpack over his shoulder and almost knocking his father down the stairs in his haste to leave the house. His mother only just managed to catch him and press a slice of toast in his hand before he was out the door.

Stan scanned the throng of students milling outside the school, searching for a head of perpetually messy dark hair and listening closely for some stupid joke or “Stan the Man! How the hell are ya?” to be yelled across campus. It was Bill’s auburn hair Stan spotted first, though, as he stood out tall and lanky against the background of the other kids.

“Seen Richie yet?”

Bill rolled his eyes. “H-hi, Bill. H-h-how are you th-this muh-morning, B-Bill.”

“Sorry – hi. Have you seen Richie?”

“N-no, not y-yet,” Bill replied patiently. “But h-h-he’s always l-late.”

“Yeah,” Stan replied, thinking. Richie *was* always late, and usually made up some outlandish story to tell the teacher when he walked in ten minutes after the bell rang. But he’d *said* he’d see Stan ‘bright and early’. Stan tried to stop thinking about it. But the bell rang, and Stan walked with the other Losers to homeroom without seeing Richie. The register was called, and the teacher pursed her lips and marked Richie as absent once again. Ten minutes into first period, Stan was starting to form a theory. True, Richie was a notorious flake, but Stan didn’t think he’d skip out on him after promising to see him. Stan remembered seeing Richie flushed and pale last night, but dismissing it as the after-effects of their kiss goodnight. Today, though, he wasn’t so sure. As soon as first period was dismissed, Stan snuck out the back doors and grabbed his bike, actually breaking a school rule for once in as long as he could remember. *He better appreciate this.*

Richie lay in bed, red-faced from coughing. A small part of him regretted his choices the previous day and conceded to the little nagging Eddie-voice in his head that sticking your tongue in the mouth of someone with a twenty-four-hour flu bug was probably less than wise. The larger part of him remembered yesterday’s ‘antics and

shenanigans' fondly and regretted nothing, naturally. He had to admit though – Stan may have been right. Lying in bed watching daytime TV while your friends hung out, even in the suffocatingly dull locale of school, was the height of boring. If only Stan would climb through his window right now – but Richie was under no illusions as to his boyfriend's levels of spontaneity and rebellion.

The clatter of pebbles against the window brought Richie back to reality.

*Nuh-uh. No way, Tozier. It's just a fever-dream-hallucination type thing.*

The clatter came again, more urgent this time, like someone was really hurling them against the window. Richie stuck his head out of the window and narrowly avoided his glasses being shattered by another hail of pebbles.

"*Christ*, Stanley! What're you trying to do, blind me?"

Stan winced. "Oops. Sorry. I'm not very good at the whole hand-eye co-ordination thing."

"I'm the one with glasses that magnify my eyes to twice their size. What are you even doing down there? You're in the *street*. My front door is *open*, you cretin."

Stan laughed. "Oh, yeah. Right. I guess I just wanted it to be romantic."

Richie had to laugh too. "Oh, yeah, totally romantic. My window has a huge crack in it, but I'm feeling all romanced and love-sick, for sure. Get up here, moron."

Stan moved to kiss Richie as soon as he entered the bedroom, but Richie held him back, swaying dizzily. "Hold up. I'm not letting all this start back up again with you catching it back from me."

"It's the flu, not a tennis ball. I can't *catch it back*. I've already had it, so I'm immune."

"Well, in that case -" Stan was two steps ahead. His lips caught Richie's mid-sentence and he pulled Richie close to him, enjoying

being in control for once and surprising Richie, instead of the other way around. He paused for a second to remove Richie's glasses for him and drop them on the bed, then he cupped Richie's face again, fingers knotted in his thick dark hair, soft lips exploring every inch of Richie's chapped ones.

"Wow," Richie said softly and shakily when they finally pulled apart. Stan grinned, uncharacteristically cocky.

"That's all you're getting for now. You look awful." He pressed a hand to Richie's clammy forehead. "As I suspected. Bed. Now."

"Oh, Stanley, I love it when you get all forceful and dominant," Richie joked, but only half-heartedly. A dizzy spell came on him again and he did as Stan told him, curling up under the covers, shivering with sickness. Stan wrapped his arms around him from behind.

"This is all your own fault, you know."

"Hey! I braved deadly sickness to be with you. Show a little gratitude."

"I'm sorry..." They were quiet for a few long moments. Richie's breathing evened out and Stan suspected that he had fallen asleep. Rubbing his cheek against Richie's thick, soft hair, he murmured softly: "I love you."

Eyes closed, Richie smiled and held Stan's hand imperceptibly tighter.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

oh my god, i'm sorry this took so long! i've been away (and reading the actual novel over that time) and coming back to this fresh has let me get on with it, so here's the final chapter! and i've already got more stozier lined up after this ;) thanks for reading, and enjoy!